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On Behalf of
R U S S I A

“What is the scholar, what
is the man for, but for
hospitality to every
new thought of
his time?”



An Open Letter
to America

By ARTHUR RANSOME

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WORLD WAR I PAMPHLET COLLECTION

P R E F A C E

*Every day brings a ship,
Every ship brings a word;
Well for those who have no fear,
Looking seaward well assured
That the word the vessel brings
Is the word they wish to hear.*

EMERSON wrote the poem I have stolen for a head-piece to this letter, and Emerson wrote the best commentary on that poem: "If there is any period one would desire to be born in—is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." Revolution divides men by character far more sharply than they are divided by war. Those whom the Gods love take the youth of their hearts and throw themselves gladly on that side, even if, clear sighted, they perceive that the fires of revolution will burn up perhaps the very things that, for themselves, they hold most dear. Those others, wise, circumspect, foolish with the folly of wisdom, refrain, and are burned up none the less. It is the same with nations, and I send this pamphlet to America because America supported the French Revolution when England condemned it, and because now also America seems to me to look towards Russia with better will to understand, with less

suspicion, without the easy cynicism that prepares the disaster at which it is afterwards ready to smile. Not that I think all this is due to some special virtue in America. I have no doubt it is due to geographical and economic conditions. America is further from this bloody cockpit of Europe, for one thing. For another, even rich Americans dependent for their full pockets on the continuance of the present capitalist system, can wholeheartedly admire the story of the Bolshevik adventure, and even wish for its success, without fearing any serious damage to the edifice in which they live. Or it may be, that, knowing so little about America, I let myself think too well of it. Perhaps there too men go about repeating easy lies, poisoning the wells of truth from simple lack of attention to the hygiene of the mind. I do not know. I only know that, from the point of view of the Russian Revolution, England seems to be a vast nightmare of blind folly, separated from the continent, indeed from the world, by the sea, and beyond that by the trenches, and deprived, by some fairy godmother who was not invited to her christening, of the imagination to realize what is happening beyond. Shouting in daily telegrams across the wires from Russia I feel I am shouting at a drunken man asleep in the road in front of a steam roller. And then the newspapers of six weeks ago arrive, and I seem to see that drunk, sleeping fool make a motion as if to brush a fly from his nose, and take no further notice of the monstrous thing bearing steadily towards him. I love the real England, but I hate, more than I hate anything on earth (except cowardice in looking at the truth) the intellectual sloth, the gross mental indolence that prevents the English from making an effort of imagination and realizing how shameful will be their position in history when the story of this last year in the biography of democracy comes to be written. How shameful, and how foolish . . . for they will one day be forced to realize how appalling are the mistakes they committed, even from the mere bestial standpoint of self interest and

expediency. Shameful, foolish and tragic beyond tears . . . for the toll will be paid in English blood. English lads will die and English lads have died, not one or two, but hundreds of thousands, because their elders listen to men who think little things, and tell them little things, which are so terribly easy to repeat. At least half our worst mistakes have been due to the underestimation of some person or force outside England, and disturbing to little men who *will* not realize that chaos has come again and that giants are waking in the world. They look across Europe and see huge things, monstrous figures, and, to save themselves, and from respect for other little lazy minds, they leap for the easiest tawdry explanation, and say, "Ah yes, bogies made in Germany with candles inside turnip heads!" And having found their miserable little atheistical explanation they din it into everybody, so that other people shall make the same mistakes, and they have company in folly, and so be excused. And in the end it becomes difficult for even honestminded, sturdy folk in England to look those bogies squarely in their turnip faces and to see that they are not bogies at all, but the real article, giants, whose movements in the mist are of greater import for the future of the world than anything else that is happening in our day.

I think it possible that the revolution will fail. If so, then its failure will not mean that it loses its importance. The French Revolution gave a measure of freedom to every nation in Europe, although it failed most notably in France and ended in a dictator and a defeated dictator at that, and for the brave clear-sighted France foreseen by Diderot and Rousseau substituted a France in which thought died and every one was free to grub money with a view to enslaving everybody else. The failure of the French Revolution did not lessen the armor which the ideas that sprang from it poured into the minds that came to their maturity between 1795 and 1801. And perhaps it was that failure which sharpened the conflict of the first half of the nine-

teenth century, in which, after all, many candles were lit and fiercely, successfully guarded in the windy night that followed the revolutionary sunset. Let the revolution fail. No matter, if only in America, in England, in France, in Germany, men know what it was that failed, and how it failed, who betrayed it, who murdered it. Man does not live by his deeds so much as by the purposes of his deeds. We have seen the flight of the young eagles. Nothing can destroy that fact, even if, later in the day, the eagles drop to earth, one by one, with broken wings.

It is hard here, with the tragedy so close at hand, so intimate, not to forget the immediate practical purpose of my writing. It is this: to set down, as shortly as possible the story of the development of the Soviet power in Russia, to show what forces in Russia worked against that power and why; to explain what exactly the Soviet government is, and how the end of the Soviet government will mean the end of the revolution, whatever may be the apparent character of any form of government that succeeds it.

A. R.

Moscow, May 14th, 1918.

AN OPEN LETTER TO AMERICA

The March Revolution in Russia

REVOLUTIONS are not definite political acts carried out by the majority in a nation who are unanimous in desiring a single definite object. Revolutionaries and their historians often try to give them that character afterwards, but that is only an illustration of man's general tendency to supply his instinctive acts with family pedigrees of irreproachable orderly reasoning. It would be less dignified but more honest to admit that revolution is a kind of speeding up of the political flux, during which tendencies that in ordinary times would perhaps only become noticeable in the course of years, reach a full fruition in a few weeks or days. Revolution turns the slow river of political development into a rapid, in which the slightest action has an immediate effect, and the canoe of government answers more violently to a paddle dipped for a moment than in more ordinary times to the organized and prolonged effort of its whole crew.

Those servants of the autocracy who fomented disorder in Petrograd in March, 1917, believed that by creating and suppressing an artificial premature revolt they could forestall and perhaps altogether prevent the more serious revolt against themselves which they had good reason to expect in the future. They were wrong, precisely for the reason suggested in the first paragraph. They were wrong because revolution is not an act of political life, but a state of political life. Hoping to crush a political act, they created the state in which the old means of control slipped from their hands and they became incapable of the suppression of any acts whatsoever.

Their immediate political opponents made the same mistake as the servants of the autocracy. They believed that the autocracy could carry out its plan and therefore did their best to prevent the revolution. Thus, in the days before the revolution of March, 1917 began, we had the spectacle of the autocracy wrestling with the bourgeoisie, both far removed from the actual people, both gambling with the lives of the people, with entirely different objects. The autocracy was trying to create a revolution which should fail. The bourgeoisie was trying to prevent the autocracy from creating a revolution at all. Looking back over a year, it is almost laughable to think that it was the autocracy that arrested the whole Labor Group of the Central War Industries Committee because that group of patriotic socialists had shown themselves capable of preventing trouble with the workmen. It is more than laughable to remember that Miliukov, the Cadet leader, sent a statement to the papers alleging that some one pretending to be Miliukov had been urging the workmen to come out into the streets, but that actually he begged the workmen, for their own sakes, to do nothing of the kind.

This is not the place in which to give a detailed account of the methods whereby the autocracy prepared the artificial fireworks which, unfortunately for them, turned into a very genuine volcano. It is enough to say that for several months before the revolution they had been running kindergarten classes for policemen in the use of machine guns just outside Petrograd, that armored cars had been kept back from the front with a view to moving target practice in the streets of the capital, and that weeks before the actual disorders Petrograd had been turned into a fortified battleground, with machine gun embrasures in the garrets of the houses at strategical vantage points. Meanwhile the food shortage, already serious in the preceding September, had been steadily emphasized. The whole labor of the country had been mobilized, put in uniforms, armed, and taken from the land, thus insuring starvation for the

nation as a whole in the not distant future. Starvation in the present was assured by the complete breakdown of the always inadequate transport. Dissatisfaction with the government was common to every class of the population, although it had different causes. Thus the bourgeoisie were dissatisfied with the government because it put difficulties in the way of a successful waging of the war that was to give Constantinople to Russia. The aristocracy were dissatisfied with the Tsar on account of his inability to keep his family in order, or to hide the fact that it was in disorder. The folk, the great bulk of the nation, were dissatisfied with the government because they held the government responsible for their increasingly difficult conditions. They were dissatisfied with the government for waging the war, while the classes above them were dissatisfied with the government for not waging it well enough.

For one moment these various discontents were united and in one matter. When the revolution had begun, when the flux had already gathered speed, when the banks of the hitherto placid stream were already crumbling under pressure of the torrent, there was not a single class in the nation that was not dissatisfied with the Tsar. The Tsar, accordingly, left the stage as politely as he could, as painlessly as a person in a play. And, seeing the bloodless character of his removal, and mistaking his removal for the object and end of the revolution, English, Americans and French united in applauding the most moderate, the biggest, the most surprising revolution in the world. The bourgeois classes in the fighting countries and those of the laboring classes who by reading newspapers had been tamed to a happy acquiescence in bourgeois ideas were a little troubled lest the disturbance in Russia should affect their war, they having forgotten that they were fighting for democracy and that the enfranchisement of 180 million souls was in itself a greater victory than they had set out to gain; so that, from that moment on, the main object of the war should have been to save that victory. But,

if the bourgeois classes in the Allied countries were a little troubled, their disquiet was as nothing in comparison with the helpless terror of the bourgeois classes of Russia. They had taken no part in the actual starting of the revolution. Miliukov, as he openly confessed to his party, had seen from his window the soldiers pouring out into the street with red flags to fight for the people instead of for their masters, and he said to himself: "There goes the Russian Revolution, and it will be crushed in a quarter of an hour." A little later, he had seen more soldiers in the streets, and decided that it would not be crushed so easily. It was only when the risks had already been taken by plain soldiers and workmen, by Cossacks who refused to fire on them; it was only when the revolution had begun, that the already existing organ of the bourgeoisie, the Duma, threw itself into line, and, foam on the crest of an irresistible wave, tried vainly to pretend that it had the power to control and direct the wave itself.

Already a newer, more vital organ was forming. While Miliukov was formulating his ideas about the preservation of the dynasty, or, in other words, the transfer of the autocracy to the bourgeoisie, the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies, at first merely a small group of Duma Labor Members, had formulated quite other ideas, had declared that the revolution belonged to those who made it, not to those who stood aside and then sought to profit by it, and had stated that neither Miliukov nor the outworn Duma had the right to decide their future for those who had won their freedom by risking their lives, but that that task would be undertaken by a Constituent Assembly which should represent all Russia. Subsequent history illustrated the necessary opportunism of all parties in a time of revolution, since within a few weeks Miliukov and his party had declared for a republic, and, when the Constituent Assembly met, it had already earned for itself a place like that of the Duma among the relics of the past, and was gently set aside by the Soviet, which had been the first cause of its summoning.

The Provisional Government and the Soviet

There were thus formed two bodies, each of which claimed to represent the revolutionary nation. The first of these was the Provisional Government, which was appointed by an executive committee of the Duma, and so did indirectly represent that body, which, never fully representative of the people, had lost in the course of the war any claim to stand for anything except the bourgeois and privileged classes. The second of these was the Soviet of Workmen's and Soldiers' deputies. Each thousand workmen had the right to send one member to the Soviet, and each company of soldiers. From the very first there could be no sort of doubt in the mind of an unprejudiced observer as to which of these two bodies best represented the Russian people. I do not think I shall ever again be so happy in my life as I was during those first days when I saw working men and peasant soldiers sending representatives of their class and not of mine. I remembered Shelley's

Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few,

and wondered that this thing had not come to pass before. And I thought how applicable to revolution are Sir Thomas Browne's words on the Flood, when he wrote: "That there was a Deluge once seems not to me so great a Miracle as that there is not one always."

Immediately there became visible a definite fissure, soon a wide gulf, between the ideals of these two bodies, the government and the representatives of the people. The people, the working classes, the peasants, who suffered most from the war, demanded that steps should be taken to secure peace. They did not want to fight to get territory for the sake of some phantasmagoric gain which did not affect

them, which they did not understand. They were starving already, and saw worse starvation ahead. The government, on the other hand, was, if anything, except for the presence in it of Kerenski, the labor member, more definitely imperialistic than the autocracy whose place it had taken.

The gulf between the working classes and the government became suddenly deeper when it was realized that the future of the revolution depended on the possession of the army. If the army were not to be swept into the revolution, if it were allowed to remain apart from politics, it would be a passive weapon in the hands of the government, which would thus be able to suppress the Soviets, and so the true expression of the people's will, whenever it should think fit. If the government had been able to retain possession of the army, then Miliukov might have had his way and the bourgeoisie would have secured the profits of the revolt of the masses.

This, however, was not to be, and immediately the contradiction between a revolution and war of the imperialistic kind became evident. The army, which at that time meant practically the whole of the younger peasantry, took the share in politics it had a right to take. From that moment the future of the Soviets was assured, and the bourgeois government was doomed to be a government only by the good will of the Soviets, who, within a few days of the beginning of the revolution, were the only real power in the country.

That they had been right in fearing retention of the army by the bourgeoisie was proved again and again, by Kerenski, Kornilov, Kaledin, Alexeiev, Dutov, at subsequent periods of the revolution, each one in turn basing his resistance to the Soviets on some part of the army which had been kept free from the contagion of free political expression.

Then began the long struggle of the summer. The Soviets, in which the moderates who, mistrusting their own abilities, desired to keep the government as a sort of execu-

tive organ, were in a majority, exerted all their influence on the government in the direction of peace. The government made its representations to the Allies, but, at any rate at first, gambled in the future, and pretended that things were not so bad, and that Russia could still take an active part in the war. There was a decisive moment when Miliukov wrote a note to the Allies calculated to lull them to believe that the changes in Russia meant nothing and that Russia stood by her old claims. The soldiers and people poured into the streets in protest, and that lie had to be publicly withdrawn.

Already there was serious opposition to the Moderate party in the Soviets from the Bolsheviks, who urged that coalition with the bourgeoisie was merely postponing peace and bringing starvation and disaster nearer. The Moderates proposed a Stockholm conference, at which the socialist groups of all countries should meet and try to come to a common understanding. This was opposed by the Allied governments *and by the Bolsheviks, on the ground that the German Majority Socialists would be the agents of the German government.* One deadlock followed another. Each successive deadlock strengthened the party of the Bolsheviks, who held that the Provisional Government was an incubus and that all authority should belong to the Soviets.

The Bolshevik leaders, Lenin and Trotsky, had come from exile in western countries not merely to take their share in a Russian revolution, but to use Russia in kindling the world revolution. They called for peace, but peace, for them, was not an end in itself. They could say, with Christ, that they brought not peace but a sword. For they hoped that in stirring the working classes of the world to demand peace from their governments, they would be putting into their hands the sword that was necessary for the Social Revolution, in which cause they had both, like many of their friends, spent the best years of their lives.

In their own country, at any rate, they have proved that they were right in their calculation. The struggle for

peace, the failure to obtain it, shook the government into the disastrous adventure of the Galician advance, shook it again with the Galician retreat, weakened it with every telegram from Allied countries that emphasized the continuance of the war. Each shock to the government was also a shock for the Moderate party in the Soviets. The struggle in Russia became, as the Bolsheviks wished it should become, a struggle between the classes, a struggle in which the issue became ever clearer between the working and the privileged classes. The government went to Moscow for moral support, and came back without it. The Kornilov mutiny, a definite attempt against the Soviets by a handful of the privileged classes, merely strengthened the organizations it was intended to overthrow. Within the Soviets the Moderate party, which had already come by force of events to be a sort of annex of the bourgeoisie, grew weaker and weaker. Just as the government went to Moscow to seek support in a conference, so the Moderate party, feeling support slipping from under it, knowing that the next meeting of the All-Russian Assembly of Soviets would find it in a minority, treacherously sought new foothold in an artificial democratic assembly. Not even the tactics of the Moderate party shook the actual fabric of the Soviets, and when, in October, first Petrograd, then Moscow, showed a huge Bolshevik majority, the Bolshevik leaders were so confident that they had the country behind them that they made every single arrangement for the ejection of the government openly over the telephone, and, notwithstanding, neither the government nor the old Moderates (now in a minority) could muster authority to prevent them.

The point that I wish to make is this: that, from the first moment of the revolution to the present day the real authority of the Soviets has been unshaken. The October revolution did not give authority to the Soviets. That had always been theirs, by their very nature. It was merely a public open illustration of the change of opinion brought

about in the Soviets themselves by the change of opinion in the working men and soldiers who elected them. The October revolution cleared away the waste growths that hid the true government of Russia from the world, and, as the smoke of the short struggle died away, it was seen that that government had merely to formulate an authority it already possessed.

What Is the Republic of Soviets?

The actual formulation of the Soviet constitution was a matter of practice in a developing democratic revolutionary power. There have been a number of small formal changes, of readjustments of interdependent parts in the machine, but I do not think either opponents or supporters of the Soviet government can quarrel very seriously with the following statement:

Every workman, every peasant, in Russia has the right to vote in the election of deputies to his local Soviet, which is made up of a number of deputies corresponding to the number of electors. The local Soviets choose their delegates to an All-Russian Assembly of Soviets. This All-Russian Assembly elects its Central Executive Committee on a basis of approximately one in five of the delegates to the Assembly. This central executive committee controls, appoints and dismisses the People's Commissaries who are the actual government. All decrees of state importance are passed by the Central Executive Committee before being issued as laws by the Council of People's Commissaries.

At each successive All-Russian Assembly of Soviets the executive committee automatically resigns, and the Assembly as a whole expresses its approval or disapproval of what has been done by its representatives and by the Council of Commissaries during the period since the previous All-Russian Assembly, and, electing a new Executive Committee, which in political character accurately corresponds to the party coloring of the Assembly, insures that the con-

trolling organ shall accurately reflect the feeling of the electorate.

No limit is set to local re-election. Deputies are withdrawn and others substituted for them whenever this seems necessary to the local electorate. Thus the country is freed from the danger of finding itself governed by the ghosts of its dead opinions, and, on the other hand, those ghosts find themselves expeditiously laid in their graves as soon as, becoming ghosts, they cease to have the right to rule.

Just as the Soviet constitution insures that the actual lawgivers shall be in the closest touch with the people, just as it insures that in deed instead of in amiable theory, the people shall be their own lawgivers, so also it provides for intercommunication in a contrary direction. The remotest atom on the periphery is not without its influence on the centre. So also the centre through the Soviets affects the atoms on the periphery. The institution of Soviets means that every minutest act of the Council of People's Commissaries is judged and interpreted in accordance with its own local conditions by each local Soviet. No other form of government could give this huge diverse entity of Russia, with its varying climates and races, with its plains, its steppes, its wild mountains, the free local autonomy of interpretation which it needs. The shepherd of the Caucasus, the Cossack from the Urals, and the fisherman from the Yenisei can sit together in the All-Russian Assembly, and know that the laws whose principles they approve are not steel bands too loose for one and throttling another, but are instruments which each Soviet can fashion out in its own way for the special needs of its own community.

This constitution is one particularly apt for Russia. It is also particularly apt for a country in a time of revolution. It affords a real dictatorship to the class that is in revolt, and such dictatorship is necessary, since no one could expect from members of the class that is being ousted from its place of domination whole-hearted assistance in its own undoing. Those democrats in other countries and in Russia who do

not understand what is happening under their eyes exclaim at the unfairness of excluding the bourgeoisie from power. They forget, or have never realized, that the object of the social revolution is to put an end to the existence of a bourgeois, or exploiting class, not merely to make it powerless. If exploitation is destroyed then there can be no class of exploiters, and the present exclusion of the bourgeoisie from the government is merely a means of hastening and rendering less painful the transition of the bourgeois from his parasitic position to the more honorable position of equality with his fellow workers. Once the conditions of parasitism, privilege and exploitation have been destroyed, the old divisions of the class struggle will automatically have disappeared.

By the nature of things it has so happened that practically all the foreign observers of events in Russia have belonged to the privileged classes in their respective countries, and have been accustomed to associate with the privileged classes in Russia. They have consequently found it difficult to escape from their class in judging the story happening before their eyes. Those working men sent from the Allied countries, less with the idea of studying the revolution, but of telling it to do what the Allies wanted, have also been men specially chosen, and deprived by their very mandates of the clear eyes and open mind they should have had. Socialists especially, who had long dreamed of revolution, found it particularly difficult to recognize in this cloudy, tremendous struggle the thing which their dreams had softened for them into something more docile, less self-willed. Nothing has been more remarkable or less surprising than the fact that of all the observers sent here from abroad those men have seen the thing clearest who by their upbringing and standards of life have been furthest from the revolutionary movement.

I do not propose to recapitulate the programme of the Soviet government, nor to spend minutes, when I have so few, in discussing in detail their efforts towards an equitable

land settlement, or their extraordinarily interesting work in building up, under the stress of famine and of war, an economic industrial organization which shall facilitate the eventual socialization of Russia. That is material for many letters, and here I have not time for one. I therefore take the two events which have been most misused in blackening the Soviet government to those who should have been its friends. These were the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the negotiations which ended, temporarily at least, in a separate peace between Russia and the Central Empires. I take these two events, and try to show what happened in each case and why the reproaches flung at the Soviets on account of them were due either to misunderstanding or to malice.

The Constituent Assembly

I suppose in America, as in England, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly was one of the events that best served the people who were anxious to persuade public opinion that the Soviet government was a government of usurpation holding its own by force, and not representing the will of the people. I think that, without any special pleading, it will be possible to bring together facts which put an entirely different light on that event. The mere fact that the parties opposed to the Bolsheviki had spent eight months in murdering the Constituent Assembly, putting it off day by day in hopes that the country would change, and that the revolution would come crawling home asking for a quiet life, leaving the gentlemen to do the work of the government, should be set against the short speech of the sailor who told the assembly it had talked enough, that its guards were tired, and that really it was time to go to bed. It should be remembered that the Constituent Assembly was for neither party an end in itself. For each party it represented a political instrument, not a political aim. It was a tool, not a task. It was thrown away when

further use of it would have damaged the purpose for which it was invented. Look back, for a moment, on its history. The very idea of a constituent assembly was first put forward by the Soviet, by the very body, which, in the end, opposed its realization. The Soviet, in those exhilarating days of March, 1917, declared that without such an assembly the future of Russia could not be decided. The effect of this declaration was to make impossible Miliukov's plan of choking the revolution at birth. Miliukov, in the first days of the revolution, tried by means of quick jugglery with abdications, a regency and a belated constitution, to profit by the elemental uprising of the masses to secure an exchange of authority out of the hands of the Tsar's bureaucracy into the hands of the bourgeoisie. For him, the revolution was to be a tramcar which would stop conveniently at the point where the Cadet party wished to alight. The idea of the Constituent Assembly was like a good big label on that tramcar showing that it had a further destination. It became clear at once that the car would not stop at the point that Miliukov had chosen. The next hope of the bourgeoisie was to keep it moving to prevent it stopping anywhere else until the passengers should be so tired of moving that they would be glad to stop anywhere and would be amenable and peaceable on alighting. The bourgeois parties deliberately postponed the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, since it was clear that, were it to meet at once, its members would be practically identical with those of the Soviet, so that the voice of the bourgeoisie would be unheard in the roar of the waking masses. The aim of the bourgeoisie was (1) to postpone the elections until the electors had wearied of the Soviets, and (2) to postpone such reforms as most concerned the destruction of their own privileges (such as the land reforms) until they could summon a Constituent Assembly whose character would be agreeable to themselves. While the bourgeoisie held this attitude it was natural that the Soviets, and, most of all the left party in the Soviets should

use the Constituent Assembly as a means of showing up the duplicity of their bourgeois opponents. Gradually circumstances changed. The bourgeoisie lost hope, and transferred their allegiance to the moderate majority of the Soviets, since they began to realize that the marked increase of Bolshevism heralded something from their point of view even worse than the Constituent Assembly as it would have been in April or May. The extremely flexible representation of the Soviets showed that the masses were coming nearer and nearer to the position of the Bolsheviks, or rather to a readiness to support the Bolshevik leaders in view of the manifest failure of the coalition government to get peace or indeed anything else that the masses desired. The Constituent Assembly became now the last hope of the original moderate members of the Soviet executive, who felt the ground of real support in the active political masses slipping from beneath their feet. At this point came the October revolution, when the coalition, already a ghost, and a discredited ghost, was laid in its grave. Immense Bolshevik majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets, and then in the All-Russian Assembly of Soviets, proved that the mass of active political opinion in the country fully approved of the step that had been taken.

Then followed the elections to the Constituent Assembly (organized and canvassed before the October revolution) in which there was a majority against the Bolsheviks. The explanation of this is perfectly simple. It lies in the fact that a revolution is a very uncomfortable thing for everybody who takes part in it, and that great numbers of people, during the preceding eight months had come to look forward to the Constituent Assembly much as children look forward to the word FINIS at the end of a difficult lesson-book. The Constituent Assembly meant for these people an end to political debate, an end even to political life, an end anyhow to revolution. In every country it is only a small minority that really concerns itself with politics. Outside that minority is a big unconscious voting ma-

terial, which does not concern itself with active politics, and asks nothing from its government except to be let alone. This indifferent mass which took very little part in the living politics of the Soviets was ready to vote for the Constituent Assembly in a sort of dim belief that those elections mean a return to quiet life, and should therefore be encouraged. It voted much as rich men give alms to a charity. It voted in much the spirit of the rich man who is willing to give alms to a deserving charity for which he would be most unwilling to do any real work. It knew vaguely that the bourgeoisie were fairly bad, and it had also heard that the Bolsheviks were terrible people. It therefore put its votes on the side of those people against whom it had heard nothing in particular. And the result was that the live part of the nation was faced almost at the moment of coming into their own with a legacy in the form of an assembly the majority in which was made up of the very men whom they had just overthrown. The question was a plain one. Should the conscious workers of the country submit to the dead weight of the unconscious, even if that dead weight were artfully fashioned by their enemies into the form of the very tool with which they had been successfully working? The question was put at a moment of extreme difficulty, when acceptance of the Constituent Assembly would have relieved the Bolsheviks (at the New Year) of tremendous responsibility. It would have been an easy way out, for cowards. But the Bolsheviks were not afraid of responsibility, were not looking for easy ways out, were confident that the whole of the active, conscious population was behind them, and swept the Assembly aside. Not anywhere in Russia did the indifferent mass stir in protest. The Assembly died like the Tsardom, and the coalition before it. Not any one of the three showed in the manner of its dying that it retained any right to live.

Peace Negotiations

The day after the October revolution Lenin proposed and the Assembly carried the declaration on peace with its promise to do away with the secret diplomacy that had kept Russia in the war beyond her strength, and allowed small groups to gamble in the lives of nations. On that day, October 26th (old style), the whole world was told that the new Russian government was ready to conclude peace itself, and invited all the fighting countries to put an end to the war "without annexation [that is without the seizure of other people's land and without the forced incorporation of other nationalities] and without indemnity." The declaration was sent out by radio on November 7th, o. s. Some governments prevented its publication, others sought to disguise its true character and to give it the appearance of an offer of separate peace. The Allies replied to it with a threat conveyed to the Russian Commander-in-Chief, Dukhonin, that further steps towards separate peace would have serious consequences. It should of course be remembered that the Allies were in a position of peculiar difficulty. Practically all the Russians who were able to give direct information to members of Allied governments belonged to the classes that had persistently fed themselves and others with lies as to the character of the Bolsheviks. They believed that the Soviets could hold authority only for a few days and they persuaded the Allied governments to share that belief. The next step of the Soviets was an agreement, made across the front itself, stopping all military operations between the Black Sea and the Baltic. This was followed by yet another invitation to the Allies to join Russia in peace negotiations. Meanwhile the German government with one eye on the military party and the other on the feeling of German Labor which at that time was unrestful and excited by the Russian revolution, was hesitating over its answer. I shall not here attempt any detailed history of what fol-

lowed. My only point is that the Soviet government cannot be accused of having sought and obtained a separate peace. The first aim of the Bolsheviks was, as it always will be, a Universal Social Revolution. They hoped to illustrate to the workers of the world the possibility of honorable peace, and nothing would have pleased them better than to find that such a peace was rejected by all governments alike, so that the workers convinced of its possibility should rise and overthrow them. That was their general aim. They, least of all governments in the world, were interested in a German victory. Their proposal was for a general peace, for the peace which Russia, in agony, had been awaiting for a year.

What followed? Step by step, they published every detail of their negotiations over the armistice, every word of the German replies. Then came the first German answer as to the conditions of peace, in which Germany and her allies expressed themselves ready to make the Russian formula the basis of negotiation. The Bolsheviks believe that if the Allies had even at that late hour joined them, so that in withdrawing from that position the Germans would have been facing a continuance of the war as a whole instead of merely a failure to obtain peace with the weakest of the Allies, peace on the Russian formula would have been attainable. The Allies left them, unrecognized, ignored, to continue their struggle single-handed. The Germans now took a bolder line and the hand outstretched in spurious friendship became a grasping claw. The first Russian delegation came home to confer with the Soviet government as to what was to be done in this new situation when the peace they had promised their exhausted army, their tortured working classes, seemed to be fading like a mirage. Trotsky at the head of a reinforced delegation went to Brest with one of the most daring plans with which any David has sought to destroy his Goliath.

The absence of the Allies had deprived him of the possibility of exhibiting to the working classes of the world

the inability of their present governments to conclude a peace in which should be neither conqueror nor conquered. He now attempted to bring about a revolution in Germany or to obtain such a peace for Russia by making the German government itself illustrate in their negotiations with him their utter disregard for the expressed wishes of the German people. He did actually succeed in causing huge strikes both in Austria and in Germany, and it is impossible for anyone to say that he would not have finally succeeded in hitting the Goliath of Force opposed to him fairly between the eyes with this shining pebble of an idea, which was the only weapon at his command, if, at the last moment his aim had not been deflected, and the target shifted, by the treachery of the handful of men who in the Ukraine were resisting by every means in their power the natural development of the Soviets. These men, preferring to sell their country to Germany than to lose the reins of government themselves, opened separate negotiations, thereby breaking the unity of the ideal front which Trotski opposed to the Germans. The Germans saw that with part of that front they could come immediately to terms. Instantly their tone in the negotiations changed. They persuaded their own people that the Russians were themselves to blame for not getting the peace they required, and that a just peace was possible only with the Ukraine. Meanwhile the soldiers and workers of the Ukraine were gradually obtaining complete power over their own country, so that when Germany actually concluded peace with the Ukraine, the so-called government whose signatures were attached to that treacherous agreement was actually in asylum in German headquarters and unable to return to its own supposed capital except under the protection of German bayonets. The Soviet triumphed in the Ukraine, and declared its solidarity with Russia. The Germans, like the Allies, preferred to recognize the better dressed persons who were ready to conclude peace with them in the name of a country which had definitely

disowned them. From that moment the Brest peace negotiations were doomed to failure. Trotsky made a last desperate appeal to the workers of Germany. He said, "We will not sign your robber's peace, but we demobilize our army and declare that Russia is no longer at war. Will the German people allow you to advance on a defenseless revolution?"

The Germans did advance, not at first in regular regiments, but in small groups of volunteers who had no scruples in the matter. Many German soldiers, to their eternal honor, refused to advance, and were shot. The demobilization of the Russian army meant little, because it had long ceased to be anything but a danger to the peaceful population in its rear. The Soviet had only the very smallest real force, and that, as yet, unorganized, with enthusiasm but without confidence, utterly unpracticed in warfare, consisting chiefly of workmen, who, as was natural, were the first to understand what it was they had to defend. It soon became clear that serious resistance was impossible. The Soviet government was faced with a choice: to collapse in a quite unequal struggle; or to sign a shameful peace. Many thought that the cause of revolution would be best served by their deaths, and were ready to die. Lenin doubted the efficacy of such a rhetorical gesture, and believed that the secession of Russia from the war would insure the continuation of the war by the imperialistic groups until such time as other countries reached the same exhaustion as had been reached by Russia, when in his opinion, revolution would be inevitable. He held that, for the future of the World Revolution, the best that could be done would be the preservation even in seriously limited territory of the Soviet government, as a nucleus of revolution, as an illustration of the possibility of revolution, until that moment when the workers of Russia should be joined by the workers of the world. His opinion carried the majority, first of the Executive Committee, then of the fourth All-Russian Assembly. The Germans re-

plied to the Russian offer to sign peace with a statement which was an ironic parody of the Russian declaration at Brest: the Russians had said, "We will not sign peace, but the war is ended." The Germans said, "We agree to peace, but the war shall continue."

And, indeed, while the Soviet government moved to Moscow, the Germans using in the south the pretext of the Ukrainian Rada, and in the north that of the bourgeois Finnish Government, advanced through the Ukraine to the outlet of the Don, and in the north to the very gates of Petrograd. The matter stands so, as I write these lines. By the time you read them, much will have happened that it is impossible now to foresee.

The Soviet Government and the Allies

From the moment of the October revolution on, the best illustration of the fact that the Soviet government is the natural government of the Russian people, and has deep roots in the whole of the conscious responsible part of the working classes and the peasantry, has been the attitude of the defeated minorities who oppose it. Whereas the Bolsheviks worked steadily in the Soviets when the majority was against them, and made their final move for power only when assured that they had an overwhelming majority in the Soviets behind them, their opponents see their best hope of regaining power not in the Soviets, not even in Russia itself, but in some extraordinary intervention from without. By asking for foreign help against the Soviet government they prove that such help should not be given, and that they do not deserve it. The Soviet has stood for six months and more, absolutely unshaken by any movement against it inside Russia. In the Ukraine the anti-Soviet minority asked for intervention and received it. German bayonets, German organization, destroyed the Soviets of the Ukraine, and then destroyed the mock government that had invited their help. We,

the Allies, supported that anti-Soviet minority, and, in so far as our help was efficacious, contributed our share in obtaining for Germany a victorious progress from one end of the Black Sea coast to the other. In helping the Ukrainian minority we helped the Germans to secure Ukrainian bread and coal and iron that would otherwise have gone to help Russia to recuperate. In Finland we repeated the mistake. We gave at least moral help to the White Finns, simply because they were opposed to the Red Finns, who were supported by the Soviets. Now, too late, we realize that the White Finns were the pawns of Germany, and that in the defeat of the Red Finns we witnessed the defeat of the only party in Finland which was bound, by its socialistic nature, to be an enemy of imperialistic Germany. Do not let us make the same mistake in Russia. If the Allies lend help to any minority that cannot overturn the Soviets without their help, they will be imposing on free Russia a government which will be in perpetual need of external help, and will, for simple reasons of geography, be bound to take that help from Germany. Remember that for the German autocracy, conscious of the socialistic mass beneath it, the mere existence of the Soviet government of Russia is a serious danger. Remember that any non-Soviet government in Russia would be welcomed by Germany and, reciprocally, could not but regard Germany as its protector. Remember that the revolutionary movement in Eastern Europe, no less than the American and British Navies, is an integral part of the Allied blockade of the Central Empires.

And, apart from the immediate business of the war, remember that Germany is seeking by every means, open and secret, to obtain such command over Russia's resources as will in the long run allow her to dictate her will to Russia's people. Remember that the Soviet government, fully aware of this, would be glad of your help, of your cooperation, would be glad even to give you control over some part of her resources, if only to prevent that ominous

ultimate dominion within Russia of a single foreign power.

Remember all these things, if indeed you need, as I think you do not need, such selfish motives to prompt you to the support of men who, if they fail, will fail only from having hoped too much. Every true man is in some sort, until his youth dies and his eyes harden, the potential builder of a New Jerusalem. At some time or other, every one of us has dreamed of laying his brick in such a work. And even if this thing that is being builded here with tears and blood is not the golden city that we ourselves have dreamed, it is still a thing to the sympathetic understanding of which each one of us is bound by whatever he owes to his own youth. And if each one of us, then, all the more each nation by what it owes to those first daring days of its existence, when all the world looked askance upon its presumptuous birth. America was young once, and there were men in America who would have brought in foreign aid to reestablish their dominion over a revolted nation. Are those the men to whom America now looks back with gratitude and pride?

Well, writing at a speed to break my pen, and with the knowledge that in a few hours the man leaves Moscow who is to carry this letter with him to America, I have failed to say much that I would have said. I write now with my messenger waiting for my manuscript and somehow or other, incoherent, incomplete as it is, must bring it to an end. I will end with a quotation from your own Emerson. "What is the scholar, what is the man *for*, but for hospitality to every new thought of his time? Have you leisure, power, property, friends? you shall be the asylum and patron of every new thought, every unproven opinion, every untried project, which proceeds out of good will and honest seeking. All the newspapers, all the tongues of today will of course at first defame what is noble; but you who hold not of today, not of the Times, but of the Everlasting, are to stand for it; and the highest compliment man ever receives from heaven is the sending

to him its disguised and discredited angels." No one contends that the Bolsheviks are angels. I ask only that men shall look through the fog of libel that surrounds them and see that the ideal for which they are struggling, in the only way in which they can struggle, is among those lights which every man of young and honest heart sees before him somewhere on the road, and not among those other lights from which he resolutely turns away. These men who have made the Soviet government in Russia, if they must fail, will fail with clean shields and clean hearts, having striven for an ideal which will live beyond them. Even if they fail, they will none the less have written a page of history more daring than any other which I can remember in the story of the human race. They are writing it amid showers of mud from all the meaner spirits in their country, in yours and in my own. But, when the thing is over, and their enemies have triumphed, the mud will vanish like black magic at noon, and that page will be as white as the snows of Russia, and the writing on it as bright as the gold domes that I used to see glittering in the sun when I looked from my windows in Petrograd.

And when in after years men read that page they will judge your country and mine, your race and mine, by the help or hindrance they gave to the writing of it.

ARTHUR RANSOME.

1871

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